

Cultural Relations in the Plateau of Northwestern America 75

This suggests another aspect of the Lower Carrier pattern. The visionary dreams of many animals, though only one or a few prove to be those he can subsequently recall in dreams. Regardless of the tutelary received, the final dream of the quest series is of the grizzly bear.

THE CULTURAL ROLE

The descriptions above are deficient in at least one respect. They convey no dependable notion of the significance of each concept in relation to the rest of the culture, or the degree to which the concept molds and influences daily life. There are clues, it is true. The Kutenai and the Sanpoil require universal participation of males in the quest, whereas but few of the Lower Carrier take part, many of whom at least partially fail. On the other hand, the dramatic nature of the Carrier quest is impressive, but the venture occupies only a month or a year of a man's life.

Upon first contact with the Sanpoil I was deeply impressed both by the intensity of the role played by the guardian spirit and by the extent to which it influenced the culture. Naturally I was uncertain whether this impression was the result of a relatively greater emphasis by the Sanpoil, or merely reflected my own ignorance of Plateau culture. The latter might well have been the case, but after long contact with Plateau peoples I feel more strongly than ever that the group of cultures typified by the Sanpoil represent the high point of the area in this respect. In another place I have expressed my convictions as follows:

Perhaps nowhere in America did the guardian spirit concept play so great a role in the lives of a people as among the Salishan groups of the [American] Plateau. . . . Not only was the guardian spirit idea highly developed here as a formal religious complex in which very nearly every man participated, but that participation was no passive acquiescence to cultural tradition. It was rather an intense identification highly charged with emotional content. . . . Here spirits were ever present. A man and his tutelary led parallel existences; the one had only to reach out, so to speak, and draw the other to him when the occasion made unitary action or cooperation desirable. The power inherent in the guardian spirit was not, in other words, a talent once conferred and thereafter effective, or a vague store of energy to be drawn upon when needed; but rather a highly specific relationship with a powerful ally available for personal action in any exigency. . . .

In everyday life this intimacy of relationship was reflected in countless references to one's own or another's tutelary, and in the invariable explanation

756
776
787
869

122
771

76 Cultural Relations in the Plateau of Northwestern America

182

771

of all unusual, impressive, or significant occurrences in terms of spirit power. Reference to one's own spirit was never specific, however, but always couched in vague or generic terms: 'my power,' 'my helper,' or, in colloquial English, 'my partner.' This last expression, heard constantly among these peoples even today, reflects most accurately the native attitude toward spirit power.¹⁰

This domination of life by spirit matters occurs with roughly equal intensity among the Southern Okanogan, Sanpoil, Colville, Kalispel, and Columbia. Emphasis is only slightly lighter among the Lakes, Spokane, Coeur d'Alène, Flathead, Wenatchi, and Kittitas, the last a Sahaptin group. Other Sahaptin peoples give markedly less attention to spirit matters but I cannot escape the conviction that this difference is of slight age and the direct result of Plains influence. All Sahaptin peoples share the extended Winter Spirit Dance with the Salish groups mentioned above.

In contrast, the interior Salish of British Columbia (exclusively) lack the Winter Spirit Dance entirely and emphasize the spirit quest and spirit causation more as formal ritual than as deep emotional ideology. For example, spirit intrusion and spirit loss as causes of illness are hardly present here, whereas to the south they are of momentous importance (see below). The period of absence on each spirit quest was considerably longer here than in the American Plateau, but this cannot be used as a criterion. The accumulated time after long repeated one-night quests might easily overbalance that of a single extended quest. The longest quests are found among the Lillooet where the duration may reach a year. Yet few persons engage in the quest and the whole concept plays a definitely minor role. The lengthening of the quest, both in this and in less extreme cases, is clearly the result of formalization and ritual emphasis, not religious intensity. The quest practice here of vigorously rubbing the body with conifer twigs might be interpreted as indicative of spiritual fervor if it were not that the custom is clearly borrowed from the Coast and that the identical explanation—ritual cleanliness—is given for its observance. The same applies to induced vomiting.

The Chilcotin present no problem in this respect. Spirit concepts are clearly of secondary importance in their lives. Their practices lie intermediately between those of the Lillooet and the Carrier. The spirit pattern of the Carrier, while dramatic, does not for a moment contest

¹⁰ Ray, *Bluejay Character*, pp. 593 f.

Cultural Relations in the Plateau of Northwestern America 77

with that of central and southern Plateau groups. An observation by Jenness is to the point:

Nevertheless, [Carrier] dreams were so erratic, visitations from the animal world so ungovernable, that no Indian hunter cared to stake all his fortunes upon them. He believed that in ancient days the animals themselves had delivered to him a powerful weapon by disclosing certain "medicines" and rituals that would deliver the game into his hands.¹¹

(The latter belief is unknown to the south.)

One last example may illuminate the judgements above. Olson writes, "Nothing bulked larger in Quinault life than the acquisition and control of supernatural power."¹² Now it is certain that the Lower Chinook gave spiritual power greater emphasis than did the Quinault. Further, the Chinook

quest differed very slightly from that of the Plateau. Even though an interior group as far distant as the Kalispel of northern Idaho be taken for comparison, the quest exhibits no significant difference; while even minor details are impressively similar.¹³

Yet it would never occur to me to equate the *functional intensity* of the Chinook concept and that of the Kalispel, the former is so much the slighter.

CONCEPTUAL FACTORS

For introduction I may refer to the quotation above in which the role of the spirit guardian and helper is discussed and the colloquialism "my partner" is mentioned.

The expression "my power" is also frequently heard among the English speaking natives of the central Plateau. The two terms "partner" and "power" seem to be used interchangeably. On the other hand the natives seldom or never speak of "spirits" or of "spirit power." Nor do they say "partner power." These English speaking habits have led to considerable confusion and have obscured the point made above. Cline, for example, states of the Southern Okanogan that "One's guardian spirit dwelt somewhere in the woods or mountains, and came to him when he thought of it or needed its aid," a formulation corresponding exactly to that given above. But he also says,

¹¹ Jenness, *op. cit.*

¹² Olson, *Quinault Indians*, p. 141.

¹³ Ray, *Historical Position*, p. 370.

182
771

776
787

Cultural Relations in the Plateau of Northwestern America 113

cussion of the Winter Performance was fundamentally different from that adopted here.⁸⁰ Spier was interested in indicating the possible Northwest Coast source for certain of the *constituent elements* of the Spirit Dance. He emphasized particularly the season and the repossession by guardian spirits. The soundness of his suggestions is indicated by their unanimous acceptance on the part of subsequent field workers. But here the object has been to place in relief the essential nature of the Plateau complex, not to seek the origin of foreign elements. On the other hand, the indigenous nature of certain elements appears. Indeed, the Northwest Coast trait of possession, especially as a criterion of sponsorship, is found to be atypical (see above).

127
796

ASSOCIATED PRACTICES

A number of closely associated practices demand attention. Initiation of the novice, for example, forms an intimate part of the ceremony among certain groups. Spier points out that

535
771
796

There are two types of inaugural dance, so far as function is concerned: the demonstration type of Oregon and the control type of northern California. . . . From a wider point of view, the control dance of northern California and the Wishram case link with the southern part of the Northwest Coast proper. A feature of repossession during the winter sacred period of the northern tribes is the overpowering strength of the spirit which makes its possessor "ill" until he is relieved by dancing. . . . This is precisely what is at the bottom of the north Californian control dances, although the sickness is due to an agent of another sort.⁸¹

The initiation feature is present among all Plateau groups observing the dance except the Flathead and, apparently, the Nez Percé.⁸² In a number of cases, however, the routine of initiation is present but no particular function is served beyond that of formal introduction of the novice (Coeur d'Alène, Kalispel, Umatilla, Klikitat?, and Tenino?). In all other instances it is essentially the control type, as opposed to the demonstration type of the Klamath. Since the control initiation is found throughout coastal Oregon⁸³ (bearing out Spier's presumption) the Plateau obviously participates in a far flung trait linking northern California and the Northwest Coast. The logical route of contact with

⁸⁰ Spier, *Klamath Ethnography*, pp. 266 f.

⁸¹ *Idem*, pp. 260 f.

⁸² It is not mentioned in Spinden, *Nez Percé Indians*.

⁸³ Barnett, *Oregon Coast*, p. 188.

114 Cultural Relations in the Plateau of Northwestern America

535
 771
 796

[756] the Plateau is the Columbia Valley. Along that route the tribes closest to the Coast should exhibit the most clearly the notion of "control." This is true only to a limited extent. The Wishram, Kittitas, Wenatchi, Southern Okanogan, and Sanpoil show equally developed, but locally varied, control concepts.⁴⁴ Absence among the Klikitat and Tenino may merely be lack of knowledge. The more distant groups, as anticipated, lack the notion but possess meagerly the form. The Klamath variation is intelligible in view of the route of diffusion. The Klamath demonstration feature is widely found in the Plateau, but in connection with shamanistic performances rather than initiations. The Wishram, however, reflect something of the demonstration idea in the initiation. But the Wishram initiation is held apart from the Winter Dance. Pertinent here is the fact that only the Klamath and Wishram restrict the inaugural dance to those who are to become shamans. Among all other groups the layman is initiated as well, in exactly the same manner as the shaman. Demonstration would not be particularly to the point for the layman.

Identification of man and his guardian spirit is a concept of restricted distribution, typical of the Plateau. A common element of the Spirit Dance is the impersonation of guardian spirits.

Another aspect, far more instructive for a fundamental understanding of the complex, is identification—as opposed to mere impersonation—with the spirit. Identification involves radical and thorough transformation from the normal human state to a condition in which all social relationships are abjured, and activities duplicate, as closely as physical limitations permit, those of the spirit.

Such identification may seem to do violence to the strongly developed duality principle. [As emphasized above, the guardian spirit stands in the relation of a powerful supernatural ally to man, but is not typically identified with him.] To resolve this apparent difficulty it is necessary to recall the native theory of genesis for the guardian spirit. During mythological times there were no human beings; neither were there guardian spirits. But the beings of that time possessed attributes of both. Their physical and psychological differentiae were those of animals, but for the most part they appeared in the superficial guise of men. The animal form as such was taken only when an emergency demanded. They sought no spirit power since they possessed it inherently. "When people came on earth," it is explained, "these beings

⁴⁴ Spier and Sapir, *Wishram Ethnography*, pp. 240 f.; Cline, *Southern Okanogan*, pp. 145 f.; Ray, *Sanpoil and Nezperce*, pp. 192-94.

116 Cultural Relations in the Plateau of Northwestern America

535
771
796

Bluejay as guardian spirit. These individuals discard normal body covering, paint the face black, talk unintelligibly or not at all, perch in the rafters of the dance house, act as sentries, and must be returned to normal at the end of the dance period by forceful smudging or shamanistic treatment. These and other traits show interesting distributional variations, but these have been treated in the paper quoted and need not be duplicated. The complex is found among the Sanpoil, Colville, Spokane, Kalispel, Coeur d'Alène, and Flathead. I may add that it is definitely absent for the Kutenai. Since the paper was written I have visited this group and ascertained the fact, then unknown.

535
756
796

Associated with the Winter Dance of the Colville is a special type of power performance which takes place behind a mat or blanket partition separating the performer from the audience. No other group shares this practice as an aspect of the Spirit Dance, but the Kutenai observe it as an individual ceremony. (The Kutenai lack the Spirit Dance.) Our knowledge of the Colville affair comes from a description by Cline, included with his treatment of the Southern Okanogan dance.²⁶ A brief description of the Kutenai performance will be given here since it is not elsewhere available.

The Kutenai utilize the ceremony for the prediction of future events, particularly in wartime, the finding of lost objects, and the like. The performance serves to bring the spirits into direct contact with the petitioner, thus making available immediate help and advice. The performer need not be a shaman; anyone possessing a spirit is privileged to attempt the contact. A man's particular spirit is the effective agent in establishing the relationship, but that relationship is with the entire spirit world, not merely the individual spirit. The ritual is not a method of demonstrating the strength of one's spirit.

The performance takes place in an ordinary tipi. The suppliant blows steadily on a whistle as he "goes behind the blanket." (The ceremony is called, in colloquial English, "going behind the blanket.") Soon he reappears with his arms behind him, his thumbs tied to his belt. The knots are untied, he returns, and the same procedure is repeated seven times, or until seven knots are tied. Then one end of a long rope is tied around his waist. He goes behind the partition and throws the loose end of the rope over the pole from which the blanket is suspended. Soon the audience sees the entire rope fall, with a small whistle tied

²⁶ Cline, *Southern Okanogan*, pp. 152 f.

TREATMENT OF HORSES.

233

horse may have contributed somewhat to their present spirit of improvidence. The horses feed in large droves, each marked with some sign of ownership, generally by clipping the ears, and when required for use are taken by the lariat, in the use of which all the natives have some skill, though far inferior to the Mexican *vaqueros*. The method of breaking and training horses is a quick and an effectual one. It consists of catching and tying the animal; then buffalo-skins and other objects are thrown at and upon the trembling beast, until all its fear is frightened out of it. When willing to be handled, horses are treated with great kindness, but when refractory, the harshest measures are adopted. They are well trained to the saddle, and accustomed to be mounted from either side. They are never shod and never taught to trot. The natives are skillful riders, so far as the ability to keep their seat at great speed over a rough country is concerned, but they never ride gracefully, and rarely if ever perform the wonderful feats of horsemanship so often attributed to the western Indians. A loose girth is used under which to insert the knees when riding a wild horse. They are hard riders, and horses in use always have sore backs and mouths. Women ride astride, and quite as well as the men; children also learn to ride about as early as to walk.¹²⁰ Each nation has its superstitions; by each individual is recognized the influence of unseen powers, exercised usually through the medium of his medicine animal chosen early in life. The peculiar customs arising from this belief in the supernatural are not very numerous or complicated, and belong rather to the religion of these people treated elsewhere. The Pend d'Oreille, on approaching manhood,

177

231

182

492

771

787

¹²⁰ In moving, the girls and small boys ride three or four on a horse with their mothers, while the men drive the herds of horses that run loose ahead. *Lord's Nat.*, vol. i., pp. 71-3, 306. Horses left for months without a guard, and rarely stray far. They call this 'caging' them. *De Smet, Voy.*, pp. 156, 47, 56. 'Babies of fifteen months old, packed in a sitting posture, rode along without fear, grasping the reins with their tiny hands.' *Stevens, in Pac. R. R. Rept.*, vol. xii., pt. ii., p. 130, with plate; *Gibbs, in Pac. R. R. Rept.*, vol. i., pp. 404-5; *Palmer's Rept.*, p. 73; *Farnham's Trav.*, pp. 81-2; *Loomer's Deserts*, vol. ii., p. 64; *Irving's Astoria*, p. 365; *Francher's Nat.*, 1 p. 269-71; *Cor's Adcen.*, vol. ii., pp. 110-11.

492

- 771 was sent by his father to a high mountain and obliged
 787 to remain until he dreamed of some animal, bird, or fish,
 thereafter to be his medicine, whose claw, tooth, or feather
 825 was worn as a charm. The howling of the medicine-wolf
 and some other beasts forebodes calamity, but by the
 Okanagans the white-wolf skin is held as an emblem of
 royalty, and its possession protects the horses of the
 tribe from evil-minded wolves. A ram's horns left in
 the trunk of a tree where they were fixed by the mis-
 directed zeal of their owner in attacking a native, were
 much venerated by the Flatheads, and gave them power
 over all animals so long as they made frequent offerings
 at the foot of the tree. The Nez Percés had a peculiar
 751 custom of overcoming the *marvish* or spirit of fatigue,
 783 and thereby acquiring remarkable powers of endurance.
 The ceremony is performed annually from the age of
 eighteen to forty, lasts each time from three to seven
 days, and consists of thrusting willow sticks down the
 throat into the stomach, a succession of hot and cold
 756 baths, and abstinence from food. Medicine-men acquire
 or renew their wonderful powers by retiring to the
 mountains to confer with the wolf. They are then in-
 vulnerable; a bullet fired at them flattens on their breast.
 To allowing their portraits to be taken, or to the opera-
 tions of strange apparatus they have the same aversion
 343 that has been noted on the coast.¹⁰⁰ Steam baths are
 515 universally used, not for motives of cleanliness, but some-
 783 times for medical purposes, and chiefly in their supersti-
 tious ceremonies of purification. The bath-house is a
 hole dug in the ground from three to eight feet deep,
 and sometimes fifteen feet in diameter, in some locality
 where wood and water are at hand, often in the river
 bank. It is also built above ground of willow branches
 covered with grass and earth. Only a small hole is left

753
825

¹⁰⁰ 'L'aigle... est le grand oiseau de médecine.' De Smet, *Voy.*, pp. 46, 205; Wilkes' *Nar.*, in *U. S. Ex. Ez.*, vol. iv., pp. 494-5; Stevens, in *Ind. Aff. Rept.*, 1854, p. 212, and in *De Smet's West. Miss.*, pp. 285-6; Suckley, in *Pac. R. R. Rept.*, vol. i., p. 297; Hale's *Ethnog.*, in *U. S. Ex. Ez.*, vol. vi., p. 208-9; Ross' *Fur Hunters*, vol. i., p. 64, vol. ii., p. 19; Kane's *Wand.*, pp. 267, 280-1, 318.